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ABSTRACT

Financial and policy discrimination in favour of urban areas has been accompanied by a decline in provision for youth in rural areas of England, resulting in deprivations of opportunity, mobility, and household. Lack of public transport and the escalating costs of motoring are the most important factors in depriving rural youth access to opportunities for employment, educational improvement, domestic requirements, and leisure. Low monies, poor housing, stressed families, and low educational aspirations correlate with the incidence of low educational attainment, and remoteness further discourages rural youth from studying for higher qualifications. Low wages and high costs of goods and transport in rural areas are basic causes of rural poverty, and access to information about welfare rights is more difficult for young people in rural areas than in urban areas. Lack of adequate housing has resulted in many young people living at home in unsatisfactory conditions or moving to cities and towns. Decreasing agricultural employment has not been replaced by alternative employment opportunities, and unemployment problems must be alleviated by greater use of local resources for economic development and greater co-ordination between policies of various government departments concerned with rural affairs. (JD)

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MISSED THE BUS?

A paper prepared by the Campaign for Rural Youth for presentation to the Youth Parliamentary Lobby

As a group of young people, and workers with young people concerned for the citizens of tomorrow, we are of the firm belief that for the reasons set out below, rural young people are faced with a decline in provision which amounts to deprivation. For the young of rural areas there is clear deprivation of opportunity, clear mobility deprivation and for many household deprivation as well. This process has taken place increasingly during the last few years when there has been colossal financial and policy discrimination in favour of urban areas.

We urge Members of Parliament to give serious consideration to this group of young people and to support them, putting pressure upon the Government to redress the situation by discriminating in favour of the neglected rural areas; knowing that because of the interinvolvement of rural life, that which would help rural youth, also helps the wider rural community.

We suggest the following:-

1. The extension of existing provision for funding to encourage initiatives in community, youth and social development for rural areas.
2. That Britain work with her partners in the European Economic Community to review the policies and programmes affecting rural areas, with a view to the setting up of a European Rural Fund.

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3. That some form of Parliamentary mechanism be established, such as a select committee to permit the appraisal of policies related to or affecting the countryside and rural communities, and considering the rural implications of policy decisions.

4. That the allocation of the Rate Support Grant should reflect the disadvantagement faced by people within the Shire Counties of England and the rural regions of Scotland.

5. That there should be more devolvement of responsibility to Parish and Local Councils (England) and Community Councils (Wales and Scotland), so that there is a greater involvement of local people in rural government.

6. That there should be provision within the Manpower Services Commission programmes to meet the particular needs of the rural unemployed (including transport costs) and for small scale or workshop schemes.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Our major concern in this paper is for young people living in rural areas. They comprise about 20% of the youth population, and occupy areas of about 85% of the land surface. In addition to this figure, a further 10% of the youth population lives in dormatory areas surrounding more densely-populated conurbations who frequently suffer from some of the factors expressed below, but not to the same extent.

1.2. Since the war, rural areas have been submitted to bewildering social changes, particularly in the last ten or fifteen years, as a result of changes in agricultural employment, the centralisation of facilities, changes in mobility and leisure patterns and so on. This process has had two major effects simultaneously

(a) on the one hand urbanising the countryside
(b) on the other hand isolating the countryside to an increasing extent.

1.3. The factors which have contributed to this accelerating process have, in many respects, gone almost unheeded in recent years because national attention has been concentrated upon the need for inner city renewal. This is an explicit national policy of positive discrimination in public expenditure on a vast scale, which has no parallel in rural areas, and the needs of the latter have suffered as a result.

2. Lack of Public Transport

2.1. This is the single most influential factor depriving young people access to opportunities for employment, for educational improvement, for domestic requirements, and for leisure.

It is the combination of this factor with others which causes the most hardship. Many rural transport facilities have been axed or cut back in recent years, and at the same time rapid escalation in motoring costs means that parents are increasingly unwilling or unable to transport non-mobile young people, and it is very expensive for older young people to obtain and maintain their own transport. Recent research suggests that probably at least 10% of rural young people are from families without private transport of any sort.

2.2. When public transport does exist this seriously curtails opportunities - Employment opportunities may be limited by bus routes, culture and leisure activities limited by the running of the final bus at the end of the working day. Limited weekend travel, the lack of Sunday travel impose further limitations. Recently, further concerns have arisen, many local authorities are considering the abolition of school buses - a policy which as a result of the building of centralised schooling hits rural areas most.

3. Disadvantagement in Education

3.1. Recent studies by the Centre for Information and Advice on Educational Disadvantagement have drawn attention to the existance of educational disadvantagement in rural areas. In rural areas, there exist the same disadvantaging circumstances such as low monies, poor housing, stressed families and low educational aspirations which correlate with the incidence of low educational attainment in cities. In addition there is remoteness which makes access difficult to facilities that might compensate disadvantaging circumstances, which makes teacher-home links weak, which

makes after school activities almost impossible, that discourages teachers from inservice training and professional renewal, and which necessitates travel often over long journeys, which may well be a factor discouraging rural young people from studying for higher qualifications.

4. Poverty

4.1. Low wages in rural areas are a basic cause of rural poverty. Agricultural wages have for many years been well below the national average wage. The same is true of wage levels in other rural industries, in particular job opportunities for girls, such as secretarial work in local towns, or work in food processing factories, where rates are usually inferior to those paid in urban areas. It is sometimes argued that fringe benefits such as low-cost (tied) housing, and cheap farm or garden produce, compensate rural dwellers for low wages. However, against these benefits must be set the higher cost of goods in small shops and in remote areas, and the escalating cost of transport particularly where the lack of public transport compels many young people to purchase a car.

4.2. For those young people (the unemployed, single parents etc.) existing at or below the "poverty line", access to information about welfare rights is much more difficult in rural than in urban areas. There has so far been very little development of advice services. For example, a recent visit of Strathclyde Regional Council's welfare rights team to the island of Islay in Argyll revealed that of 30 people who were in contact with the team, 29 were entitled to extra benefits, totalling over £5,000.

5. Housing

5.1. Finding adequate housing constitutes a severe problem for young people in rural areas. The owner-occupier sector is inaccessible to young people because houses in many parts of the country are either bought by middle-class commuters to nearby towns and cities, or are bought by urban dwellers as holiday or retirement homes. There has been a dramatic escalation of rural house prices in the past ten years because of these demands. The private rented sector is now much less accessible because recent legislation to control eviction from tied housing has made landlords reluctant to let cottages to other than farm workers: many such cottages have been adapted for furnished holiday lets.

5.2. The local authority rented sector is the main type of housing available to young people but in many areas there are barriers which make access to local authority housing difficult. Chief among these are a need for a residence qualification in the area, the long waiting lists, and the lack of accommodation for single young people. Many local authorities have planning policies resistant to building houses in villages. As a result of these problems many young people are forced to remain at home in unsatisfactory conditions, or move to cities and towns. Some live in totally inadequate accommodation - for example mobile homes, or winter rental of summer holiday cottages.

6. Inadequate Employment Opportunities

6.1. As well as the pressure upon rural housing easing out young people, it is clear from the reports of agencies working with the homeless in London and other areas that unemployment levels among school leavers and young people

is encouraging many of them to leave home, and a sizeable proportion are from rural areas.

6.2. Because of mechanisation and improved farming methods, two-thirds of the jobs in agriculture have disappeared since the war, and with these jobs have gone the associated crafts and trades. The creation of alternative employment has not kept pace with this decline, and there is a great shortage of professional opportunities in the countryside for those with a mere academic background. Rural unemployment is now as high as that in other parts of the country and in the Fens, West Cornwall, Devon and the Western Isles there are peaks of unemployment reaching 10-20% more than twice the national average. In other areas the migration of young people away from an area disguises the unemployment problem which causes the migration. An example of these hidden statistics are the large numbers of young people from the Scottish Borders requiring help from London Housing Advice Agencies. Statistically the unemployment in the Borders does not seem to be high.

6.3. If unemployed, the rural young person will have few friends (a 20% employment rate among village young people is only a handful of youngsters) no facilities during the day, and may well be rejected by adults in areas without traditions of unemployment. Jobs, if offered, can sometimes be inaccessible due to the severe shortcomings of the public transport system.

6.4. The seasonal nature of work is a particular problem in areas where tourism is a major industry and this affects girls more than boys. In areas such as the West Country there is a high demand for labour-intensive work in hotels, guest houses, restaurants etc during the summer providing jobs for perhaps four

months of the year - the period which unfortunately coincides with the peak demand for labour in agriculture. The winter, in contrast, is a time of high unemployment, coinciding with the closure of recreational facilities.

6.5. Solutions to unemployment problems facing young people in rural areas are long-term but may lie in a greater use of local resources for economic development, and in greater co-ordination between the policies of the various government departments concerned with rural affairs. There is potential for expanding employment in rural industries, tourism, and possibly agriculture. Some specific suggestions are:-

The Development Commission should concentrate more attention on the provision of workshops in villages as opposed to factories in small towns.

Initiatives should be encouraged for the establishment of seasonal workshops in areas of major tourism.

The schemes for community co-operatives being developed in North Wales, the Western Isles, and the West of Ireland should be adapted for use in other parts of rural Britain.

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Appendix

The Campaign for Rural Youth

The Campaign for Rural Youth is a working party of people concerned for young people in rural areas, established in 1977 after a national conference to examine the issues. Its concerns are to draw attention to the problems of rural youth and to spread information to encourage youth work in rural areas, and has just completed a research survey of the young people in a cluster of Lincolnshire villages. Organisations represented on the Campaign for Rural Youth are:-

British Youth Council
Brunel University
Cornwall Youth Association
Coventry Diocesan Board of Education
Devon Youth Association
Kent County Council
National Association of Youth Clubs
National Council of Social Services
National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs
National Youth Bureau
Scottish Association of Youth Clubs
Scottish Council of Social Services
Somerset County Council
Suffolk Council for Voluntary Youth Services

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